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The University of
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NEWS RELEASE

Oct. 3, 2003

Contact: Patrick Weasel Head, UM interim director of American Indian Student Services,
(406) 243-6352

UM SETS UP SERVICE TO AID INDIAN STUDENTS

MISSOULA, Mont. –

With more American Indian students than ever attending the University of Montana, officials on the Missoula campus have set up a program to make sure that Indian students are successful in their studies.

The newly created American Indian Student Support Services program is designed to help students with all facets of college life, according to Patrick Weasel Head, the program's interim director.

"We wanted something that would assist students once they got here," Weasel Head said. Weasel Head said UM currently has about 460 Indian students enrolled in classes – the largest Indian student enrollment ever at UM.

In order to help Indian students succeed, Weasel Head said UM President George Dennison and other University administrators decided last year to create a new support services program. Weasel Head was asked to set up an advisory board and look at what other schools in the United States were doing to help Indian students succeed.

The new program kicked off at the start of the academic year, with offices in the UM Lommasson Center behind Griz Central. With funding through the UM President's Office, the program hired two staff advisers.

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“We want to help them with everything a person needs to do at The University of Montana,” Weasel Head said.

That includes financial aid, housing, health services, campus recreation and academic advising. Program goals include:

- Helping Indian students adjust to the campus and community.
- Advising students on how to use campus services and encouraging UM programs to accommodate the needs of Indian students to enhance their chances of success.
- Working with existing services on campus to improve delivery and assure that Indian students stay in school and graduate.

In the past, Weasel Head said many Indian students have had problems adjusting to life on the UM campus.

“Our primary focus will be to help new students and transfers from tribal colleges,” he said. “Our ultimate goal is to help these students graduate.”

Weasel Head said the new program will be modeled after UM’s successful Foreign Student and Scholar Services program – which helps students from other countries adjust to life at the University.

The program also will try to pair new Indian students with upperclass Indian mentors. It will seek out host families in the community to make new students feel more at home, as well.

For more information on the program, contact Patrick Weasel Head or Selena Hill at (406) 243-6352.

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